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nay deadly, enemies for centuries. But the family of 619
Faris had, because of a blood-feud, been living with the 628
Ruala for the past sixteen years. This accounted for the fact that a Shammar could act as my protector in the territory of his tribe's deadly enemies; but the choice also displayed Nuri's wisdom. Being a Shammar, Faris could safeguard me with the enemies of the Ruala, while as Nuri's confidant, he could answer for me before every Rueyli.

Faris was an exceptional man. From the moment of 157
our first meeting, when Nuri introduced him to me, I felt that this must be more than a mere chance acquaintance. The softness of his voice, as he wished me "Peace", and the grip of his strong, manly hand in an instant disclosed to me the open and pure soul of the young Bedouin. Under his hair-cloth cloak beat a heart so affectionate, yet so stout, that I must confess I have never encountered its like among the children of men. To his last breath he was the truest friend I have ever known. Faris was also one of the handsomest men I have ever met. His noble, oval face was unforgettable, with its gentle, dark eyes. His wonderful hair and beard, his flowing shepherd's cloak, made him a striking figure. Tender and gentle as he was, Faris was yet among the boldest and bravest of Ishmaelites. Perhaps he was living two thousand years too late.

After we had left the old suburbs of Damascus be- 487
hind us, our way led through walnut, olive and apricot orchards into the great open spaces. Majestically the snow-capped peaks of the Syrian mountains rose into

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●487 the brilliant blue of the skies. Bumpy, dried mud-paths ran through the bare fields and thin, grey meadows. Then came rolling plains, across which ran a puzzling confusion of paths. On the edge of the steppe stood a [486] Syrian Custom's station, where our passports were examined. At last we could leave the overland route; and now, without paths or signposts to guide us, we were in the uncharted desert. Our automobile raced over the hard, dry, pebble-strewn soil, ever eastward, along a never-ending, narrow tongue of land that seemed to dip deeper and deeper into a boundless, shimmering sea. A cloudless sky rose above us and on either side were misty gleams of water over which the air quivered. Suddenly, like apparitions out of the haze, appeared some Arab [492] sheep-breeders. They had but few camels and horses with them, but they rode on asses—a sign of their decadence. They were Fua're. We noticed them as we bore away towards a sheet of water glistening in an elongated depression of the desert.

133 Mirages were frequent and often incredibly deceptive. Only with difficulty was it possible to distinguish the real rain pools, which were only a foot or so deep with their surfaces ruffled by the wind, from the phantom pools, whose surfaces would be smooth and glassy. Suddenly we noticed ahead of us numerous flocks of sheep. Almost breast-deep they were crossing the flooded land. Automatically I reduced speed, for I suddenly saw, not a hundred yards ahead, a gleam of water—a shallow lake—and we were driving straight into it. I twisted the steering-wheel round, and then only did I realize that what we saw was a dry trough filled with

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000 I, and two slaves—had consequences which we did not then anticipate.

[487] We held a straight northerly course until we crossed
[648] the old Tudmur-Baghdad caravan route—"The Road of Death", as the Ruala had come to call it since the French Administration had forbidden them to cross it. Their camps were already within thirty-odd miles of it.

The scenery changed after we had passed beyond this "boundary." With a hardly perceptible gradient, the wide plain rose toward distant hills. White clouds sailed in the blue sky—a long-missed and promising sight, for it was the first sign of rain we had seen for weeks. Herbage was visibly thriving here, thicker and much taller, and there were flowers. The farther we advanced into the North and the uplands, the richer became the vegetation; and many wild fowl and also some gazelles started up at our approach.

We pushed on through the virgin grasslands without stopping at a speed of twenty-five to forty miles an hour, in spite of mounds and hills rising in close succession, until we had travelled perhaps a hundred and twenty-five miles from our base—not, however, in a straight line, for I (who had the wheel) had made many a wide detour to avoid the enemy's tents. Now and then we had sighted enemy bands, sometimes appearing with startling suddenness, and had been fired at. But we were always out of range, and without being harmed or having to answer the fire, we reached, in the afternoon, the pastures of Nethel in the upland steppe among the northern hills of the Abu Rijmeyn.